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## EDITORIAL COMMENT

### *Back to Earth*

NOW that Mr. Maeterlinck has surprised some of his followers by writing a realistic play about the war they should not be startled at proof that he is not an incurable romanticist in life. At any rate his break with Georgette Leblanc and his marriage to Mlle. Renee Dahon has compromised his position as a man not entirely of this world. It is true that Maeterlinck never pictured himself as pale-pink mystic in a scarlet world, but it was the position forced upon him by that world. In this estimate the world was nudged along by Georgette Leblanc. When she came to this country in 1911, she was fond of describing herself as the one connecting-link between her husband and the world. She described him as a man utterly impractical and naïve and unsophisticated. She held conferences with disciples of the absent philosopher and interpreted his work for them.

The new wife of Maeterlinck is quite different, according to the stories which come from Paris. She is unpretentious as an actress, so the newspaper stories say, and only notable for her fresh fluffy beauty. It is improbable that she will undertake to interpret Maeterlinck. Perhaps all this is for the best. The passion to interpret authors always seems rather a waste of time. This waste does not lie only in the fact that the interpretations are seldom accurate but that even if they are correct they are not important. After all the interesting thing about a writing man

is not what he means but what he says. Now Maeterlinck has said so much on the stage that was interesting that it is a pity that people should bother their heads to crawl behind his plots to discover hidden symbols. It would be well for the world if it could only get into the habit of believing that an author means just what he says and nothing else. We are all of us too avid for philosophies. We are not willing to accept simple things but must mull over them until they become complex. It is not enough that a man should have an interesting story to tell. He must have a message.

Maeterlinck must be credited with having fought hard against all this. He boxed with Georges Carpentier and had himself pictured as receiving terrific right-hand swings on the point of the chin. Even then his reading public would not accept him as a member of the worldly world in good standing. It even read symbols into his passion for boxing and so he received the blows of his instructors in vain. It is even possible that Maeterlinck's marriage with the fluffy little French actress is a deliberate step to convince the world that he too is among the mortals. After all there is nothing incompatible in the fact of living in the world and writing in the clouds. Most the dreamers are better so. Man does not live by dreams alone. It is well that we should ask those who see visions to come back and be of us for a while. They go back to their task of sky-scanning with clearer eyes. Even the mystics need occasional vacations.

*Fighting Words*

FROM the beginning of time, poets and politicians have celebrated the triumph of fighting freemen over serfs, of volunteers over paid mercenaries, and of men in righteous causes against the iniquitous. All these things are true, or rather tend to be true, but they are not to be taken literally. After all, righteous causes do not invariably prevail and paid mercenaries sometimes turn on volunteers and rend them. We have heard a great deal lately about the important part which ideals played in the success of the American army in the great war. Nobody wants to minimize the importance of an ideal in our army until people begin to look upon it as the only factor in success. Then it is time to call a halt. If no protest is made we shall be back exactly where we were a few years ago when Mr. Bryan purposed to preserve the peace of the world with a million freemen who should spring to arms overnight.

But, admitting that lofty and, in a certain sense, abstract ideals played a part in the formation of the morale of the American army there is one other interesting factor to consider. Supplementing the large pride of country is a smaller and sometimes more intense pride of organization. A soldier will die as readily for a brigade, a regiment or even a company as he will for a country. In the American army this was perhaps less notable than in the French. After all, our military traditions were not so ancient though the men who fought in this war have left plenty for those who shall come after. But, since it is the best case in point, consider the French Foreign Legion. This was an organization made up originally from the adventurers of the world. Many of them did not profess any great ethical or

sentimental interest in the war. They were not concerned with its causes or its objects. Their loyalty to France itself was not deep-rooted. And yet this division was one of the finest fighting organizations of the war. Thousands of men passed through it. Replacement after replacement replenished its ranks. Some of these new recruits were of no great promise. Sometimes they were no more than men who went to the Foreign Legion because life had treated them too harshly. They were seeking, some of them, no more than a change of luck. But for whatever reason they came the tradition of the Foreign Legion gripped them. Though they were new to its ranks its prestige rested heavily upon them. Even the occasional adventurer who had been none too scrupulous about his own honor was zealous to the point of heroism about the reputation of the Foreign Legion.

It all comes down to the fact that men need a phrase or a word for which to die but that it need not be a lofty one. It is possible that some of our own went forward with "To make the world safe for democracy" ringing in their hearts, but it is entirely possible that shoulder to shoulder with these men went others who gritted their teeth and said to themselves "Heaven, Hell or Hoboken by Christmas." Perhaps, it is not enough to consider how the soldier phrases his thought. The lofty catchword and the cheap one may mean the same thing, but there come times in battle when the soldier is too busy to hold to any catchword no matter what its form. And at such times he goes on and does his job without thought of any reason except the fact that it is his job. And when war gets into that temper the freeman and the serf and the paid mercenary and the volunteer stand almost on a level. They are all cogs in the machine.